

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Applicant responds herein to the Office Action dated June 13, 2007.

Claims 11-14 were rejected in the Office Action. Applicant added Claims 25-26 and respectfully requests a reconsideration of the rejection. Claims 11-14 and 25-26 are currently pending in the Application.

Claim 11 was rejected in the Office Action under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Kamikawa (U.S. Patent No. 6,158,449) in view of Hayashi et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,331,987). Reconsideration of the rejection is requested in view of the following remarks.

Claim 11 recites an upper purge element positioned above the process chamber and supplying the inert gas downwardly and a lower purge element positioned below the upper purge element and discharging the inert gas in a direction substantially parallel to the surface of the processing liquid stored in the process tank, i.e., in the direction of the exhaust elements (as shown, for example, in Fig. 7 of the present Application). Thus, a uniform gas flow formed by the lower purge element and the exhaust element generate a shutter (i.e., an air curtain) on the surface of the processing liquid, improving the drying efficiency and eliminating the necessity for a separate shutter element.

Contrary to the claimed invention, neither Kamikawa nor Hayashi discloses or suggests the lower purge element located below the upper purge element and discharging the inert gas parallel to the surface of the processing liquid stored in the process tank and in the direction of the exhaust elements. Instead, Kamikawa discloses an apparatus where the cleaning tank 22 (the processing tank) and the drying chamber 23 (the processing room) are spatially isolated from each other by a shutter 48 during execution of each process. One set of gas supply nozzles 44 is provided to supply the drying gas to the substrate and not to form the gas flow near the surface of the processing liquid inside the process tank, as required by Claim 11. Specifically, as shown in Fig. 4 of Kamikawa, when the surface of the processing liquid is located inside the processing tank 22, the processing tank is separated from the gas supply nozzles 44 by the shutter 48. Therefore, no air curtain is formed at the surface of the processing liquid.

Similarly, Hayashi fails to disclose the lower purge element of Claim 11. Instead, Hayashi discloses a gas supplying element directing gas stream in a downward direction and not in a direction parallel to the surface of the processing liquid.

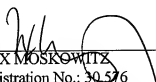
Accordingly, Kamikawa, even in combination with Hayashi, fails to disclose the lower purge element positioned below the upper purge element and discharging the inert gas in a direction substantially parallel to the liquid surface stored in the process tank. Therefore, Claim 11 is believed to define patentable subject matter.

Claims 12-14 and 25-26 are believed to be patentable over the cited prior art because of their dependency on the allowable Claim 11 and, further, on their own merits.

Accordingly, the Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider the application, allow the claims as amended and pass this case to issue.

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Respectfully submitted,


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